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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence

24 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam
(As of 1600 EDST)
No. 23

Military Action

1. Most Communist combat initiatives remain concentrated on the western and southwestern approaches to Saigon. Communist units on April 24 captured several government outposts blocking their way in Hau Nghia Province. To the south, in Long An Province, the North Vietnamese 8th Division continued driving north to the east of Route 4, overrunning a number of government positions. If these forces continue at their current rate, they could reach Saigon's outskirts within a few days.

2. The level of fighting remains low in the delta, as Communist units complete preparations to renew combat. The Communists are apparently having the same coordination problems which led to the fairly severe mauling they received in early April. Although the local balance of forces is now more in favor of the government in the delta, some military officials now admit that the fate of the delta will be decided closer to Saigon. The defeatist attitude prevalent in the military hierarchy at Saigon and Bien Hoa is now spreading to Can Tho, where the main topic of conversation among the military staff members is the question of what to do when the Communists win.

Newly Arrived Divisions Press Attacks

3. Two newly arrived divisions -- the 316th and the 325th -- are now pressing South Vietnamese forces west

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and southeast of Saigon. The 325th, which helped capture Ham Tan two days ago, has moved west and is fast approaching the port city of Vung Tau. Another division -- the 6th -- may be converging on the city from the north.

4. Vung Tau is an important port at the mouth of the Saigon River and has been considered for use as an evacuation site. The government has shifted the Airborne brigade extracted from Xuan Loc into Phuoc Tuy Province in an attempt to block North Vietnamese forces moving against the city, but that unit and the forces closer to Vung Tau are no match for the Communists. Vung Tau could fall within the next one or two days.

5. The North Vietnamese 316th Division, which has moved into western Military Region 3 from the highlands, also has gone on the attack. The 316th participated in the fighting along Route 22 southeast of Tay Ninh City, and late reports indicate it is assaulting government positions in Hau Nghia Province.

The Refugee Situation at Vung Tau

6. In addition to the military threat developing around Vung Tau, there are a number of internal difficulties that Saigon is trying to counter. As many as 65,000 refugees have been pouring into the coastal town each day this week, forcing the government to prohibit any more from entering the city. Refugees currently on the way to Vung Tau are being diverted to several delta provinces, including Go Cong and Kien Hoa. Government officials are also transferring many refugees by ship to the delta to relieve the crowded conditions and to prevent another panic situation such as developed at Da Nang.

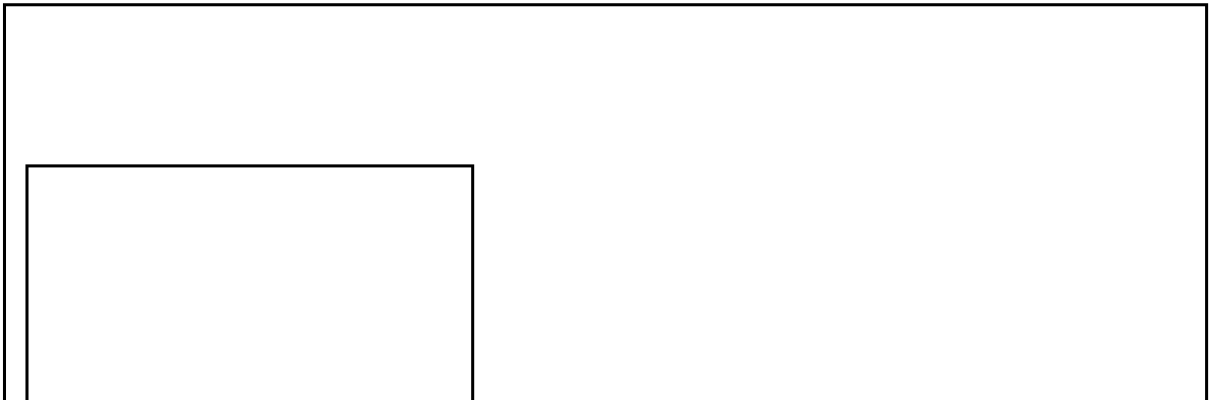
7. Despite these actions, large numbers of people are likely to continue to head for Vung Tau in the belief that it is their hope of escape. At last report, the road

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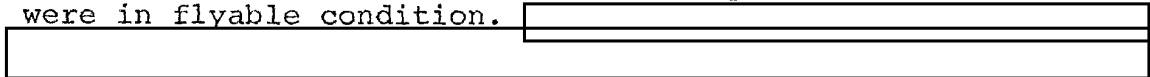
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from Saigon was still open and both civilian and military traffic were heavy. With the likelihood of the port at Saigon being closed due to interdiction of the river, Vung Tau and Rach Gia, far to the west, are the only ports capable of handling large evacuation vessels. For those hoping to escape the country, it remains the last hope and these desperate people could soon bring complete chaos to the city.



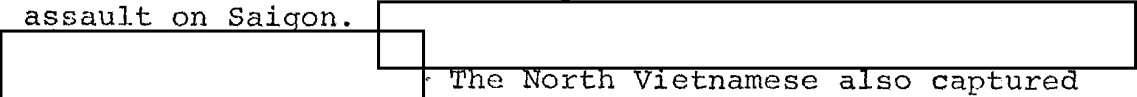
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9. The South Vietnamese abandoned a large number of aircraft including A-1s, F-5s, and A-37s when they withdrew from Military Regions 1 and 2, and many of the aircraft were in flyable condition.



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10. A recent [redacted] report indicated that the Communists would use MIGs and captured aircraft in the final assault on Saigon.



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The North Vietnamese also captured large quantities of munitions for the various South Vietnamese aircraft.

South Vietnamese Airforce

11. The South Vietnamese are now able to fly about two-thirds of their 1,500 aircraft. Most of these aircraft are



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still flown from Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, and Can Tho. South Vietnamese figures show that nearly 400 aircraft were destroyed or abandoned to the Communists. Official estimates conclude that at the current rate of usage, there is enough ordnance remaining for 15-20 days, if stockpiles are not replenished.

The Political Situation

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12. Negotiations between General "Big" Minh and President Huong to organize a new government appear to have hit at least a temporary snag. [REDACTED] Huong is unwilling to relinquish the presidency to Minh but instead wants him to serve as prime minister with "full civil and military powers." Minh, in turning down the offer, argues that the Communists will continue to refuse to negotiate while Huong remains as president.

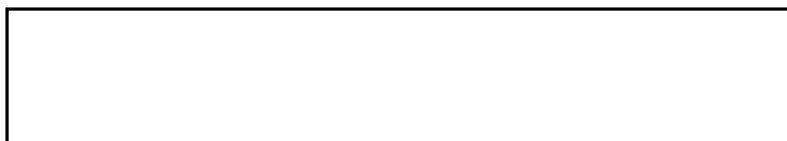
13. Minh apparently has picked up some powerful support from among former members of the Thieu government. In a conversation with an American official today, Minh said that Joint General Staff chief Vien agreed that Huong should resign from the presidency. Former prime minister Khiem will also support Minh's bid and try to persuade Huong to step down. Khiem feels that with his and Vien's support, the military can be persuaded to accept Minh as president.

14. A Viet Cong commentary broadcast over Liberation Radio today hardened earlier Communist demands for a new government and appeared to support Minh's argument that he is the only South Vietnamese nationalist of prominence with whom the Communists might agree to negotiate. The commentary stated that any new government in Saigon must "not consist of those who have closely associated with Thieu." It must demand that the Americans immediately withdraw its personnel and support and must require that the US immediately remove "all US warships and Marines."

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15. The commentary also reiterated earlier Communist concern about the US evacuations of South Vietnamese, and implied that some action might be taken to stop them. It warned that the US would "be held fully responsible for all consequences" if it insisted on continuing its "present policy."



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